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THE TRAVELLER'S TALE

BY

CLIFFORD BAX

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THE TRAVELLER'S TALE

BY

CLIFFORD BAX
(Author of "A House of Words," etc., etc.)

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TO

BHIKKHU ANANDA M.

I dedicate this book,

being confident that although, as a Buddhist,

he will not entirely approve its metaphysics,

he will recognise in it the sincere

exposition of another man's

outlook.

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THE SUN-CHILD.

FAR in the South Pacific, gorged
With heat for many a cloudless month,
Smouldered an isle where, age on age,
The earth's imagination, big
With beauty that had built no form,
Wrought in unshackled ecstasy
And, thrusting forth in time and space
The too keen bliss of being, found
Fulfilment of that primal urge
That aches in whatsoever lives.

Along the isle from shore to shore
Out of the rich enraptured soil
The sun's green architecture rose—
Deep jungles of gigantic palms
And ferns and fiery clambering flowers.
Who may surmise how long the trees,
The gentle glad unravening trees,
Devised their beauty, frond by frond,
Before at last out of the surf
Hungry amphibians crept ashore?

Who knows? Our old unquiet dream
Of some far age when all was well
May rise from memory fathoms deep
Of how, long since, in leaf and branch
Lay curled the embryo soul of man.
Yet though the deeds I tell of lie
So deep in Time that no man then
Had seen the myriad-memoried Nile,
Already those unhistoried shores
Were thronged with shapes of battling life,
Reptile and mammal, birds and men.

I was among that ancient folk,
A hunter. There was none more strong
And none that had more skill than I
To hurl a boulder, build a lair
Or scent a slot: from which it came
That I had four great stones, the best
In all our country, and the best
Woman. Her shoulders and her thighs
Were smooth as pebbles found in foam;
Her eyes were large; and when she ran
Her bobbing breasts would make me think
Of birds upon a sparkling sea.
Great joy of her I had by night,
Grasping her loins with both my hands
And crushing up her beauty. Men

Dared not so much as weigh the stones
I left with her, for I was fierce
And all men feared my teeth,—nor they
Only: the forest knew my strength,
And many a time I heard the trees
Quavering for dread because I passed.

Now, on an evening dense with heat,
As near the jungle-fringe we lolled,
The countenance of the melting sky
Swept me with fear. For day by day
The sea drank up the sun, his fire
Dissolved among her moving waves
And all his emptied soul become
A glory of unrippled air:
But that night he was hunted down
By black cloud-spirits,—colossal beasts
That long before he touched the sea
Swallowed him. All the water sobbed,
And horribly through the jungle fled
A muttered warning. While I gazed
In terror lest the sun were lost,
I heard my woman shift and moan.
And then, remembering how for long
Her belly had been hard and big
And she slow-footed like those beasts
That any boy could slay, I knew

That in her body lurked a man.
Again she moaned. I bade her rise;
And on the way toward our lair
We heard incessantly the palms
Plotting in evil undertones.
I did not touch her all that night.
I was afraid.

Above our heads
There was the same familiar gap
Of sky among the lofty leaves,
But not the scattered drift of stars
That watched us once; and not a glint,
Not a moon-shadow, touched the boughs.
Then, as I thought with misery "Some
Intangible ferocious god
Has eaten sun and moon and stars,"
The woman kicked and writhed. At once
The jungle clattered; all the air
Growled: and a cataclysmic roar
That rocked the isle from end to end
Shivered the sky with cracks of fire.
And thereupon a raging rain,
That never slacked for half a moon,
Smote me. And what knew I of rain?
Brief-memoried as a child I was
And cosseted by a golden year.

She that lay near me bit the ground,
Straightened, rolled over and lay limp,
And there, beneath the bellowing sky,
Slowly out of her body's mouth
Came the new creature. Half-asleep,
I heard her muttering hour by hour.

At length among the streaming palms
A dismal dawn that had no fire
Crept: and I rose, and took my stones
For hunting. Not a creature stirred.
All the day long I listened hard.
All the day long I heard the rain,
The rain, the all-surrounding rain,
The million-fingered maddening rain.
I went back empty-handed. Then
Deeper among the trees we built
A second lair, and sought for sleep,
And shivered under a heap of mould
Glad of our bodies' mutual warmth
But sick with hunger. So for days
I crawled about the forest, bent
On slaughtering food, but never once
Had scent of monkey, boar or bird:
And every dusk I plodded back
Through sticky steaming undergrowth,
Carrying a few wild berries. Where,

I wondered, were the island-men?
Had they been phantoms of my sleep,
And was I left there, I alone,
For ever with a sunless world?

At last, when days and nights had gone,
Hoping to find the sun I crept
Onto the shore. The sea was grey:
The sky was crushing down the world:
And yet I saw the rocks I knew
Standing unchanged. I shook my fists.
I howled and leapt, leapt my own height
To show the clouds I had no fear.
I let them see my teeth. I flung
Fragments of rock and thriving boughs
Full at the unresisting sky
And thought it quailed: but when I paused
I heard the hard rain pit the sand,
The rain, the all-surrounding rain,
The million-fingered maddening rain.

That day I would not hunt. I pulled
The woman from a nest of ferns
Which she had gathered, and kept dry
Beneath her body. In its warmth
I huddled. She was angry. Then
I struck at her. To shield the babe

She turned and bent; and as I struck
A flare of thought that seared my brain
Made me cry out. I understood.
I had the sun within my power.
I knew now that he was not slain
But wrathful, and I knew the cause.
Who set the child within her womb?
Who but the sun? And now the sun
Was charging us to give him back
The creature of his moulding. Up
I sprang. The woman watched me close.
Horror was in her look. But I,
Intent upon one aim, set forth
Into the jungle and fared on
Deeper than ever man had pierced.
I wanted wood, unwetted wood,
And with dead branches and my nails
I grubbed it from the earth,—a load
That made me stagger. "Now," I said,
Returning, "there shall spring a fire,
A signal that the sun shall heed,
And in among the antlered flames
He shall behold our sacrifice,—
The man he made, the woman's fruit,—
Perishing: and the rain shall cease."

The lair was empty. Peering round,

I called her with a cry, a long
And swooping cry that she knew well;
And waited. When she did not come
I scraped a hole to hide the roots,
Long as my arm. Again I called.
There was no sound except the rain,
No stirring but the rain-stirred leaves.
I stamped the earth, I wept for rage,
And rushing hard began the hunt
And caught her trail: and as I yelled
The island-men with glaring eyes
Came, half in terror, from the earth
As many as my fingers. All,
Seizing my thought, mad for the sun,
And swinging from despair to hope,
Pursued the woman. As for her,
Being too desperate now for dread,
She dared the forest's unknown heart
Where shaggy red ourangs abode,
And where behind the creaking stems
Invisible monsters watched her come.
Often she stumbled, often fell;
And when she heard us, many a time
In terror smothered up with leaves
The whimpering of her babe. At last
She saw her plight: she knew herself
Alone among the staring trees

And lost for all time. Hunger, too,
Sucked at her thoughts, and in the dusk
She could not see to gather food.
And then her will went out. She dropped
Like a dead bird: and all her thoughts,
Eddying in anguish, passed their bound
And vanished in a cloud of sleep.

I was the first to find her,—nay,
My foot had almost found her first.
The long brown body, indistinct,
Made me jump back and cry. She woke,
Saw me, sprang up and dashed away,
Silent. But I had seen her child,
And hope and fear within me turned
To whips of fire that lashed me on,
And screaming out her name I drew
The others back from left and right
Until about her crashed a storm
Of stones and boughs. And then she tripped.
I roared, and pounced upon her back
And pinned her: and her eyes went white.
We drove her outward through the trees,
She with the sun-child. When she flagged
We smote until a crimson sweat
Rolled from her flanks; and many a time
The bright-eyed monkeys, peering down,

Spied what she held between her breasts
And goaded her with flying sticks.

Night had now come,—and that was well,
I told them. If the isle were dark
We might make sure the startled sun
Should see us clearly. Crouching low
To guard them from the rattling rain
We rubbed the roots and made them hot,
And seeing the new-born fire spring forth
Clapped with our hands against our thighs,
Exulting. But the woman stared.
She alone had no heart for joy,—
And when the spluttering fire grew fierce
And frighted back the dazzled air
And shrivelled up the hanging leaves
And thrust us outwards, she alone
Sat silent. We ourselves were flames--
Frenzied fantastic human flames—
Who leapt and swayed round the red glare
With men of shadow, crying, "O Fire,
Call down the sun, the angry sun!
Bring back the sun, bring back the moon,
And make the sky spew out the stars!"
As for myself, delirious now
With sudden heat and violent hope,
I seized the child; and when my mate
Struck at me blindly, hurled her down

Where others held her. Very small
And very light the sun-child was,
And in a flying jot of time
I tossed him to the furnace. There
His life was licked up like a leaf
And went forth hissing like a snake.
But in that flying jot of time
I saw his eyes and in their depth
Something which I had known and shared
Before the heaving world had shape:
For, brief and brilliant like a lamp
Moved in a lighthouse far at sea,
Through that obscure long-perished brain
Loomed my great lost Eternal Self.
It flashed and sank. I knew no more
Thereafter than my bounding veins
That would not let me sleep that night.

When the first scents of dawn had come
We left the dripping jungle-gloom,
And on the shore awhile we stood
Bewildered by the silent world,
For no rain fell. And soon the sun
In marvellous resurrection swam
Up from the palms, and round the sky
Spread a huge fan of blinding gold,
And all the forest-creatures waked,
And red-winged birds flew forth for prey.

My woman watched them. We with shouts
Of jubilation hailed the light
But on her face were running tears.
And someone cried, "The woman weeps!
Look to her! Look,—she calls the rain!"
I saw her cowering at my feet.
I took a stone. I crushed her skull.
She fell, and did not move. The men
Ran back among the sparkling trees,
And I was left. She did not move.
I kicked her, but she made no sound.
Something began to bubble up
Within me, and my mind became
Like water boiling. More and more
It swirled and heaved. It shook my limbs
And flung me flat along the sand,
Grovelling in grief. I wanted back
My helper, my most prized of things,
My kindler of mysterious joy.
She would not move; and there I lay,
Biting my arms in hot remorse
And heedless of the mounting sun,
Until I heard the men hard by
Shouting, and saw them gathered round
A newly-slaughtered honey-bear.
I rose. I hunted all that day,
Or slept. And on a moon-clear night
Strangled a man, and took his mate.

MIDPIECE I.

(THE MOON.)

IT is not I who control the pulse of my heart:
It is not I who impel the blood in my veins.
We are bound together by strong invisible chains,
But I and the form that is with me are creatures apart.
Whether I wake or sleep,
Rejoice or ponder or weep,
That other is labouring still
With a separate will.
It bears me along through change. It is much to me
As the ship that carries the sailor across the sea,—
A prison, a home, a cause of delight or woe,
His first and close companion and yet not he.

For of all the marvellous things that a man may know
As he voyages over the years, there is none that excels
The body in which he dwells.
Within the enchanted cave of the womb upcurled
It lay, shut in from the noise and glare of the world,
Remembering, under the spells of a wizard law,
The murmur of woods and waves that no man saw.
It comes of a line so vast
That none may measure its Past,
None say what kindled the fire
Transmitted by mother and sire.

Gods that were mighty in fame,
And empires now but a name,
And the splendour, the folly, the tears
And the toil of a million years—
All these it has left far back
In the dust of its love-lit track,
As the sparks that fly from the brand
In a runner's hand.

The soul weighs anchor at birth
And furrows the life of the earth;
For ships of adventure are we
And ride upon one great sea.
Not mine, not cloven apart,
Is the life that upholds my heart,
But on through the void it spins,—
It has fur and feathers and fins,—
It creeps, it flutters, it flies,—
It opens, blossoms and dies:
And yet though the force be one
That moves in a man or a sun,
A bird, a bloom or a tree,
It is not verily he!

The mark of man, his mingled pleasure and pain,
And all that the world has suffered, comes of the strife
Between the will of the soul and the will of life,
And the clash of these in the brain.

THE SOUL-SEEKER.

CONSTRAINED at last by a law supreme as death
I faded out of the rare interior worlds,
And like the faltering ray that a diver sees
My spirit pierced through a deepening dusk to life.
Little by little the form in my mother's womb
Gathered me into itself, as the shadow of earth
Slowly decreases the dazzling disc of the sun.
Round me closed my past. The good and the ill
Of bygone action, eager to bear their fruit,
Thrust me back in the world, and I was born
One summer's night in a Babylonian house.
There was it, in the ensuing years, that first
For me the intricate flower of the personal soul
Began to cleave the husk of inherited life.

My mother died in the hour that gave me birth:
My father fell in a quarrel between our king
And an Ethiopian prince: and I, a babe,
Was housed by a humble potter. Year by year
He and his lady cherished me with a love

Hardly less than they gave to their true son.
With him I lived as a brother. We shared our games,
Our toys, our meals in the low white room; and yet
Of all our mingled childhood nothing remains
In memory but a single day in the woods
When, having entrapped a squirrel, we bound it fast
And peering hard at a pyramid built of boughs
Burnt it alive with a prayer to the sun-god Bel.

Now, after seven years more the mourners wailed
Above my master's body, and we two boys
Put ashes upon our heads and beat our breasts:
But that night we were glad as we lay and talked.
We felt that we were no longer children. Death
Had shattered the mould of our lives, and in the dark
We planned our future. Before a day had passed,
Lingering behind a door I heard with dread
An old man offer to buy me: but a month
Waned, and my foster-mother withheld me still.

Not long thereafter she sent me over the fields
To bring back wine from Babylon. Swinging a jar,
I journeyed happily on to a twin-towered gate,
And, having loitered awhile in the market-streets
That glowed with metal and fruit in the sunset-light,
Entered a byway. There at a noisy inn
I called. The taverner heard me, took my coins

And bade me wait on a bench till the wine were drawn.
I looked about me. The room was long and low.
Vine-leaves latticed the window, and in the air
Mosquitoes ping'd. A group of boisterous men
Were throwing dice at a table, and drinking hard.
But one man, lean and sad, was sitting alone,
He stared so long at my face that I felt abashed,
And whensoever he caught my unwilling look
He smiled. I strove in vain to avert my eyes,
Then joined him. And the warm dusk dimming the room
So blurred the circumference of my boyish mind
That, while we drank together and through the noise
I heard him tell of adventure in far-off lands,
Dream and reality, fascination and fear,
Mingled within me. And now, having dazed my thoughts,
He spoke of the unplumbed powers in the will of man,
Of words that enslave the daemons in earth and air,
And lastly murmured, "Tell me the wish of your heart!"
"To be so strong," I answered, flushed like a girl
And with a titter at which I flushed the more,
"That I might strangle a lion." "You shall be! Wait!"
He whispered: and like a noise in a sleeper's ear
The taverner came with a jar of sesame wine.
When he was gone the magician rose, and said,
"To-morrow, child, at the same hour, meet me here,—
But keep your coming a secret." And with these words
He paid his count and went forth into the dark.

His mind had numbed me. I could not frame a thought
I felt his presence hovering within my brain,
And not for long had I will enough to go.
Before I had turned the end of the moonlit street
The taverner, whistling softly, beckoned me back.
"Boy," he muttered, "be wary. Abide at home,"—
And therewith entered the inn and shut the door.

I went from the city, and walking the chariot-road
Mused upon what my brother would say and do;
And coming thus to a downhill halfway home
Heard, on a sudden, faint steps dogging my track.
I dared not turn my head. I began to sing,
And straining still to hear what I strove to hide
Knew that it followed close. . . . A blown leaf passed.
I saw it, and murmuring, "Ishtar guard my soul!"
Pushed onward quickly. What had the taverner meant?
If the magician slew me, how should he gain?
And, if I dared, what wonders might I behold?
My brother was not so timid. "He," I thought,
"Shall act in this, and I be a looker-on:"
And deep in plans I beheld the lights of home.

I had not reckoned amiss. In bed that night
I told him all that had chanced, and word by word
Cunningly kindled his emulation, provoked
His taunts, repulsed them enough and not too well,

And lured him on, like a hunter, until he stood
Plunged in a mire of boasts that held him fast.

When the next day was dying we started forth
Secretly. First, avoiding the open road,
We crept on under the neighbouring vineyards: then,
Breaking our silence and being beyond all eyes,
Followed the chariot-marks to the twin-towered gate.
We made no pause in the city, but hastening on
Entered the tavern. My comrade called for wine.
A slave-girl served us. Many were those who drank—
Soldiers and merchants, ear-ring'd panders and thieves—
But idly did we seek the magician's face:
And after a little my brother, quick in wrath
And quick to resolve, pulled at my sleeve, and rose.
I followed him out. Near by, in a coign of shade,
The man stood, waiting. He glanced to left and right,
Smiled, and bade us approach him, saying no word.

The autumn sunset bloomed, and beyond our sight
The domes and towers of Babylon glowed wine-red,
And all the gold on her palace-terraces blazed.
The world, it seemed, was alight with unearthly fire
And even the squalid alleys through which we wound
Were hazed with glory. And pressing onward still
Through leper-haunted ways that neither had known,
We travelled a route so wry that courage at last

Began to shrink and we felt the terrors of one
Gripped by a violent current far from shore.
The houses dwindled away. We entered a field
So blue with dusk that we hurt our feet on the stones
And heard as we stumbled the slither of unseen snakes.
At length we stopped. We had come to a little house
Builded stoutly of clay, with an upper room
And two high narrow windows. In at the door
We huddled; and on a sudden, starting back,
My boy-companion uttered a cry of dread:
And something whined. The magician called for lamps.
A dark shape fumbled, and struck a flint: and there
Before us glimmered a board with meat and wine.
Then the glow spread, and I found beside me one
At whom sight sickened. The flat skull made no brow;
Continual slaver flowed from the lunatic lips;
And where the throat had once been gashed with a knife
A livid pucker remained. . . . We sat to meat,
And so stayed long,—my brother, without a thought
For poison, letting his hunger have its fill,
I, taking little and, though I desired to speak,
Silent. My thoughts were heavy, my brain befogged
With vague disquiet, as though in that upper room,
Obscenely tangled, were vile invisible things
That flapped on the floor or sucked themselves to the wall.

At length, as the meal was ending, I heard the man
Say to my brother in tones that grief made tense,

"But if, in truth, an immortal spirit exists
Where does it dwell? and what is the worth of life
Till we know that? I have sworn to find the soul,
See it, touch it and never doubt of it more!"
Again their voices dimmed, and again I heard
The sad magician sighing, "The soul, the soul!"
And in his look there was anguish. Then, like a sun
Breaking through clouds, my comrade cried with a laugh,
"Now for the work!" We rose: and taking a lamp
On which was carven a battle of beasts and gods,
The spirit-seeker led us by broken stairs
Into the room above. And watching him well
I saw him smile as he locked the door with a key
Slung to his girdle. The room was shaped like a bowl
Inverted; and on the floor was a scarlet mat;
On the mat an ebony chair; and before the chair
A brazier newly-kindled. While, at his word,
I kneeled and slowly fanned the glow to a flame,
The man, becoming suddenly harsh and keen,
Charged my brother to strip: and the boy obeyed.
I gazed in horror, thinking "Whether it be
For good or evil, he is the first, not I,"—
And saw him, naked and golden, step to the chair
And toss a tumbled look from his eyes, in this
Alone revealing his apprehension or hope.
And now the magician, bending over the fire,
Dropped aromatic grains from a phial of glass,

And muttered. Then, as a fragrant smoke unrolled,
He clapped his hands and chanted the names of gods,
And half of me swooned away as he clapped his hands
And half of me heard him chanting the names of gods.
The boy's eyes blinked no longer. The man's voice cried,
"O perfume, enter his body and work my will!
Out of the nostrils, out of the eyes and ears,
Out of the bone and the flesh,—harry him thou!
Come forth, O Spirit! Come forth as grass from the blade,
The child from the womb, the timid bird from the tree!
Reveal thyself! I conjure thee,—stand thou here!"
So saying, with hands outstretched and with eyes intent,
He paused; and then cried out again and again,
"Come forth, O Spirit!" The sad monotonous tones
Benumbed my brain like serried billows of sleep,
So that the room began to expand or shrink,
So that I saw them now in a crystal air,
Now as if both their heads were hung in a void
With four unflinching hard inimical eyes.
At times they became gigantic, and then grew faint;
And knowing that if I remained inert too long
The sound should swallow me up, I whispered my name
And strove to narrow my thoughts to the key, the door,
The stars and the world of men: but I could not move
And over myself I hovered, cloven in two.
The eyes of the victim shut. The magician ceased,
And muttering under his breath unsheathed a knife

And took up a bowl of strong black earthenware.
I thought I had shrieked, but no noise left my lips,
For now I beheld him setting the bowl with care
Up to my brother's throat. And muttering still,
He chose a point, like a sacrificial priest,
And pushed the blade far in. With a gentle sigh
The boy let one hand slip; and the steaming blood
Gushed to the bowl and ran in glistening skeins
Down to his belly. I heard it fall on the mat—
Faster and faster. The first bowl now was brimmed,
And gazing upon it, as if through another's eyes,
I saw black shapes, intelligent curls of smoke,
Eddying mosquito-like on the yet warm pool.
The man stared hard at the body, and with his foot
Beating a rhythmic measure began to cry
"Behold, O Spirit, slowly I drive thee forth!
I draw his life away like an ebbing tide:
I leave thee naked of life,—a stranded ship.
Where art thou? Show thyself! I have laid my snares:
I have thee bound: I command thee, show thyself!"

The dead form lolled; and suddenly through the foul
And vibrant room, like water about a stone,
Rippled a clean cold silence. Back to the world
It shocked me. Life, in its peril, dinned at my brain.
I saw the long knife tear at the boy's left breast.
I saw the key, the door and the stooping man,

And hot in his eyes an unassuageable thirst,
A look of the whole soul yearning with all its years.
Along the rim of the room where the shade was deep
I crawled, as a serpent inch by inch on a bough.
I came to a point behind him : then, without fear,
Straightened my body, silently stepped one pace
And raising both my clenched fists over my head
Struck him with all my being. He swayed and fell.
I watched his body, inert but breathing still :
And, having unloosed the key from its iron ring,
Pulled the door wide. A dim shape cowered away.
I shouted, and pushed it out of my path ; and then,
Stumbling precipitately down the dark stairs,
Fled from the house in moonlight through the fields.

MIDPIECE II.

(MERCURY,)

OF all that is I, what shall remain
When life has fluttered from heart and brain?

The soul, although it outlive the breath,
Slowly starves to an after-death.

It feeds on the world, and being made
Of shadows is in itself a shade.

But man is sphynx. The spirit and soul
Are head and trunk of a diverse whole,

And the sands of death as they rise and spread
Smother all but the royal head.

This, the unageing spirit, alone
Divines a glory that none has known,

For only with eyes of eternal youth
Does any gaze on beauty or truth.

Itself unshaken by death and birth
It looks through time at the soul on earth

And, like one tale among many, hears
The dream that moves her to joy or tears.

Was it a single dream that wrought
This I, this tangle of sense and thought?

Though all but the last may lie unguessed,
The immortal self is a palimpsest

That many a hand in many a clime
Covered with tragic or laughing rhyme.

Death shall close the outward eyes,
But nothing which can see death dies.

THE VOLCANO.

THE hand of Christ had not yet swerved aside
The will of half mankind in mid-career
Nor Europe, coming of age at Bethlehem,
Set foot upon a sterner road than youth,
When I, pulled earthward as a tossed ball drops,
Woke in a fair Greek town beside the sea.

In childhood I was fierce,—my ancient soul
Teaching her tale in brief to that new brain—
But suddenly my ill deed of ages back
Burst like a time-fuse, and my childhood passed.
For others in a boys' game, tired of search
And finding me at last within a copse,
Branded my feet. Thereafter, being now
A cripple, solitary and shy of men,
I came to love books better, and at length
Worked for my bread with one who spent his days
Copying Greek manuscripts for men in Rome.

So did I toil until my eighteenth year,
And then one day the straight road curved anew.
Spring was upon the hills with hyacinths,
Anemones and jonquils. Through the town

A blithe procession stepped with pipe and song.
I alone felt no joy. For some time now,
Pushing through boyhood into flower, my soul
Had known itself an item of the world:
And long since had my body found and lost
That first Narcissan wonder and delight
Which has no tinge of passion or of pain.
Now I knew both: now at a glance or word—
And sometimes even at the one word "she"—
I quivered with intolerable desire
To strain another's beauty into mine.
And that desire, which fled along my nerves
Like flame on oil, no sooner caught my brain
Than, subtly changing form, it weighed me down
With mournful ponderings over death and man.
Nothing seemed worth attainment. Every hour
I felt the immensities of time and space
Like cyclopaean boulders on my back.
I came to dread the myriad-eyed contempt
Of starry nights that, shrivelling up the world,
Made all the history of mankind no more
Than a gnat's humming. Such was my despair
That many a time, considering with disdain
The ignominous handful of my years,
I could have thrown back life without a sigh.

Among these thoughts I laboured all that day.

Then, as the spring eve lit the rain-bright air,
A foreign traveller, entering where I sat,
Asked me for books of magic. Turning back,
He saw the serried lines that I had penned,
And smiled, and paused, and lastly spoke of one—
A Roman, placed in Egypt—who, he said,
Had bidden him find a penman skilled in Greek.

So was it that in time I boarded ship
And sailed for Alexandria,—for that hour
To which my life meanderingly had steered.
Perhaps it was pre-sentience of that hour
Which made my heart throb and dispersed my gloom
When, as along the harbour's oily calm
The ship stole in with sunset on her vans,
I first beheld, half dazed with foreign cries,
The proud step-city of Egypt. There a boy,
Carrying my worldly goods upon his head,
Climbed on before me through the swarthy throng
Up to the Roman's house, wherein that night—
Sheer on the precipice of my fate—I slept.

So fair a life now lulled me that in shame
I jarred my slumbering sorrow for mankind.
Whatever the world said in praise of Rome
I found in my new master; and, not less
Than the Egyptian slaves within his house,

Feared him and honoured. Had he doubted that
He would not have befriended me too well.

For with him dwelt his daughter; and we two,
Meeting throughout the day, came more and more
To share the world, to mingle smiles or thoughts,
To read or play together; nor for long
Did either know what made the time so sweet.
But one day, like a mountain close to which
Our minds like little towns had slowly formed,
The smothered want within us, glowing at last,
Flung from its depth torrents of molten joy
So mighty that within a single hour
All that we had been was a smouldering waste.

I was accustomed when the evening stirred
To wander through the hillside garden, fair
With tesselated pathways under vines,
With palm and cactus, and with eastern blooms
That fanned in me soft sensual vague desires.
But most I sought out one deserted part,
An inner space of grass high-walled with leaves.
A hundred summers there seemed hoarded up,
So still it was: and at its further end
A pillared Aphrodite stood superb,
Watching a fountain. From which cause the place
Bore still the name of "Aphrodite's Bower."

There on that day, when I had lain for long
Tormenting my lethargic melancholy,
She, my playfellow, found me. And awhile
We talked at happy random, girl and boy.
The sun went down. From far below we heard
Faint voices and the throb of starting oars.
Then she, at rest upon the fountain's rim,
Poised herself sideways, and began to play
At fluttering up the water with her hands;
And on a sudden, watching her, I felt
My soul, drawn unawares beyond its depth,
Drowning within the sweetness of her youth.
Not I alone grew silent, but she too.
I turned away my face. Her plashing stopped:
And, though I could not hear her now nor see,
I felt the life within her quivering there
Beside me, almost tangible—like a bird
With burnished breast and glory on its wings.

Our spirits began to signal. Round us rose
A sense of unknown splendours closing in;
And when again our eyes met and we spoke,
Each found, though neither knew what sea we sailed,
That every look or movement or chance word
Convoyed us on to some mysterious isle.
I wanted to cry out her name for joy
And more and more I dreaded lest I should,

And all be lost. She sat there, chin on hand,
Her body breathing loveliness, yet so still
That over it her myriad-rippled gown
Might have been stone. I did not dare speak out
But, with the guile of love, buried my face
Within my hands. I felt her spirit pause.
I felt her stoop towards me like a cloud
Of fragrant fire, and on my wrists her life
Came winging through her fingers. "Dear, dear boy!"
She murmured, and at last her mouth met mine,
And all the long-pent youth in me rushed up
Like a loosed fountain glorying to the sun.
"To-morrow." "What—to-morrow?" "Come," she said,
"At midnight—here—to Aphrodite's Bower."
My limbs were fire. I caught her body close,
And felt her tightening back, and gripped her arms
Recklessly. "No,—not yet," she whispered: then
Smiled, and went out, singing under her breath.
For long I did not move but lingered there
Luxuriating in memories of her touch
And light as spirits beyond the change of death
Where music is an element like the air.

A night passed, and a day. The hour drew close.
I was alone. I lit an earthern lamp,
And, full length on my couch, gazed at the flame.
Sometimes a fleeting terror crossed my heart.

There were two selves within me, one the old
And one that had but lived a single day,
And this new self that I desired to be
Stood giddily over the chasm between the two.
Even the now familiar room appeared
Like some live thing that could not move or breathe
But watched me with another sense than sight.
I thought the little noises in the house
Would never cease. I fancied that the slaves
Had somehow guessed that she and I now loved
And had been put to seize me, should I stir.
A silence came. I heard their halting steps
And wondered, breathless, would they block me in,
A prisoner, till the time were gone, or now
Could I slip forth? Again there was no noise.
I gathered up a cloak and flung it on,
And gliding without sandals past the door
Caught the soft air like spray upon my cheeks.
Then at the outer gate I loosed the bolt
And brushing back some flowers, and winding on
Through the fantastic garden, as when we dream,
Came in at last to Aphrodite's Bower.

Shrill in my ears the fountain's jubilant plume,
Showering continual starlight, called and cried
Like an enamoured naiad: and between
The feet of Aphrodite lay a flower,

A crimson lotus-blossom, newly-plucked.
Half wondering at myself, I took her feet
Between my palms, and having kissed them, breathed
Softly and many times the loveliest name
That ever burgeoned from the heart's desire.
It fanned my own hot wonder and suspense.
What should I learn? What was it,—this delight
Wrought between man and woman? When she came
How beautiful she would be to sight or touch,
And to what eddy of unimagined bliss
Might I be swept? Through such a cloud of thoughts
At length I saw her enter. She was clothed
And hooded in a robe of such dark red
As only in full starlight showed its hue.
I could not stir. She lifted both her arms
To Aphrodite, saying a verse we loved,—
And sweetlier for her faintly foreign tone:
Then, with a playful finger to her mouth,
Dropped on her knees beside me. When I saw
The lustre and dilation of her eyes
Their joy, like moonlight mirrored on a shield,
Flashed from my spirit again in sheer delight.
We touched. We kissed. I drew her nearer still.
We lay there close and murmuring. When, for want
To see once more that ardour in her face,
I rose upon one hand, my raiment slid
Noiselessly down, like snow from sunny leaves,

And left me naked in the flowering grass.
No sooner had my body felt the stars
Than something mightier than the self I knew
Flooded my heart and nerves, and through me sped
Immense primeval vague remembrances
And fugitive sensations of all time
Such as attend the stirring within the brain
Of that which is eternal. When it passed
I found my senses quickened and the life
That lit my body burning thrice as clear.
My lover laid her dark head to one side,
Opened and shut her eyelids, and began
To utter little fervent cries of love
That mingled with my name. The folded silk
Fell backwards from her shoulders, and before
I knew it I had looked upon her breasts—
Golden, defenceless, mine—and stooping down
Kissed them and kissed her shoulders and her arms
And her strong throat, again and yet again
Insatiably, and felt her eager hands
Constrain my lips fast to the place they found.
For hovering instants of untempered light,
As flame and indistinguishable flame,
Our spirits trembled within the blinding glare
Of self-annihilation, each in each;
But ever, upon the very verge, our bliss
Broke and was whirled into a thousand hues

Not less divinely sweet, and we once more
Were lover and belovéd with one love
And separate only to a point so fine
That, as we breathed each other's beauty in,
It circled back in ardours of new joy
Which to the other seemed again in each
More to desire; and mounting, touch by touch,
Our double rapture like a blazing sun
Turned on itself, and could not fall or fade.
Then suddenly, like a soft and luminous cloud,
The pale gold of her whole form, slipping free,
Dazzled me, and I knew her naked as I.
My hands flew glorying over her bright limbs,
And our eyes met, and all their meaning flashed
Like meteors of delight along our nerves:
And knowing how the mighty moment at last
Had risen, I flung away all fear and care,
And under me her delicate firm flesh—
Her mouth to mine, her breasts yielding to mine,
Her smooth full thighs cleaving to give me way—
Palpitated, and through my being gushed
The violent sweetness of contrasting sex
And the vast wonder, hardly to be believed,
Of finding her all strange and all unknown
And mine to know. We strained our bodies close
And closer in a tumult of dire need
And measureless hope, and height by height strove up

Toward the crest of being. A moment came
Of madness that made mockery of all sense
And, carried out to the utmost bound of life,
Full into her I passed; and she and I,
Molten by that white ecstacy into one,
Contained all love, and round us and beneath,
Wider and wider, fiercer and fiercer, surged
And spread the waves of splendour that tossed us on
Out of ourselves into a full mid-blaze
Of superhuman bliss. The very life
That charioteers the flying sun, for me
Thrilled in that fair girl's glowing cave of love
And there I felt her soul beating its way
With mine up from the murk that men call life
Toward some inconceivable godlike state.
For one supreme bright instant we were swept
From time itself, and with a shuddering joy
Touched the eternal void, and shimmered there,—
Brilliant immortal beings: but on that peak
The glory that was impossible to sustain
Or breathe and now was like to break our hearts,
And would have driven us over the edge of life,
Relaxed, released our senses and our souls,
And ebbed softly away. A lassitude,
More tender than the touch of summer foam,
Enswathed me. Far within myself I saw
Clear visionary floating tulip-isles

With towering sacred trees of scented wood,
And then lost memories of my childhood years.

Men may live myriads of days and yet of these
Few, or but one, feed the immortal self,
The rest being merely rind about the fruit,
Even as it was with me. For after that,
Like many in every country and every age,
I walked the earth a still-embodied ghost.
The wrath of him whose honour I had scarred,
The lashes and the expectancy of death,
Seemed in my exultation no more real
Than pictures or the words upon a page.
I went to exile. There, from step to step,
Trod through the round of man till that last hour
When, lying within an attic, old and sick,
I heard the sea, and men unloading ships:
And, all unheeded, like a water-rat
Silently lapsed into the stream of death.

MIDPIECE III.

(VENUS.)

THROUGHOUT the apparent world's phantasmagoria glows
Life, the deep thirst for joy from which all heaven arose.
A million forms unfold and seize the fire and pass,
But life itself remains that which at first it was:
And what now stirs in me and makes the new leaf spread
Once moved a Pharaoh's heart and flowered above his head.

Forever cooped in forms, forever unexpressed,
Life in a torment roves the world, and cannot rest;
And when wild creatures love, seeks only not to die,
Only to build new shapes for that fierce I-am-I;
But in the love of man something that dwells apart
Is mingled with that force which pulses in the heart.

Even as the same life glows in flower and world and sun,
Behind all mortal masks the immortal spirit is one;
And music not of time and glory not of space
May touch the golden hour when form and form embrace,
And—life to life below and spirit to spirit above—
They fuse their separate selves in one white flame of love.

Of old were temples built, and man in far-off days
Shall worship love once more with that sweet first amaze,
But not till shame have thawed and through the mind that sleeps
A sap of wonder thrills from long-forgotten deeps,
Not till again our thought, questioning earth and sky,
Turns from the ashen How to seek the glowing Why.

TRANSITION.

WHO now remembers the might of Chosroes?
And what man is chilled by the sound of his name?
For dead are the Persians and dead are the Romans.
Faintly they fresco the walls of the Past.
Yet, though in waking we smile at our anguish,
The terror we dream of shuts out the world:
And we of to-day are the dream of to-morrow,
As Roman and Persian are dreams of to-day.

While (as a wayfarer, finding a river
That followed and checks him, will do off his clothes)
I, having stepped from the road of the living,
Layer by layer dismemoried my soul
Until as a naked impersonal essence,
I flowed with the flowing and vanished in God,
Life, through the turmoil of ages, had burdened
With passion and sorrow the wombs of the world.
And now, many-voyaged and weighty with treasure,
Like a huge galleon the empire of Rome,
Outworn and broken and plunging and creaking,
Knew herself doomed by the rent in her keel:

While, at due distance, intent on their plunder,
The nations of Europe clung to her wake.
And now, too—a bottomless wonder, a witness
Of godhead to all but the fool in his fog—
The Cross, that at Calvary had kindled and burgeoned,
Upheaved with its roots half the worn world:
And, goldening slowly in Persia's meridian,
The Crescent of Mahomet, faintly descried,
Awaited the darkness,—the night that should follow
When Persian and Roman had shocked and were still.

Into that raging collision of empires
I was caught up as a shell in the spray:
For high in its heaven my distant Immortal,
Having now shown me the marvel of sex,
Willed that from suffering and causing to suffer
Pity should lead me to love of my kind.
Such was the target of fate when it made me
A Roman, a soldier, a ruler of men,
Able and honoured,—and not till my autumn
Stirred by the self that was hid in my soul.
Twenty long years had I lived with the legions.
Much had I travelled, and many campaigns
Fought. And the word flew now that Chosroes—
The wielder of myriads, the king among kings,
He, the fire-worshipper, he, the wife-mastered,
The elephant-rider,—had stepped from his throne

And over the desert was glittering toward us
With camels and chariots an hundred abreast;
And sacking Jerusalem and swarming on Syria
Had burnt at its border the raiment of Rome.
Wherefore from nerveless Constantinople,
Legion by legion the armies were launched
Eastward. Among them I sailed, I also;
And, lucky-winded, we came to port.

Marching beside them I seemed to my fellows
An active and trustworthy leader: and none
Guessed, as I gave him commands or exhorted
Or punished, how nightly, alone in my tent,
Often refilling my lamp as it guttered
I read in the Gospels the story of Christ,
Until as I pondered the words of the Syrian
I saw with amazement the blindness of men.
Even such beauty was barren! The violence
Of nation with nation endured as of old.
And yet, though the spirit ascending within me
Quailed from the shovelling of men to their death,
When we drew near to the season of battle
And over and over again I had thought
"You fool! How easy to sever the tangle
By feigning a sickness and keeping your tent . . ."
Shame overwhelmed me. Rome had been smitten,
And what had I thought if she smote not again?

Thousands would perish to beat off the Persian.
Who could live, shielded by others who fell?
Neither had Jesus rebuked the centurion,
But "render to Caesar" he said "what is due."
And thus in a torment of inward division
I went on a day with the men of my rank
Into our soldierly Emperor's quarters,
And viewed on the vellum my place in his plan.

For under Mount Taurus on the plain of Cilicia
The Emperor Heraclius halted his host.
And, harried and cuffed by the hated centurions,
The soldiers,—a medley of manners and tongues—
Boasting and bantering and gibing obscenely,
Raised in the morning a city of tents.
There, in a hubbub of shouting, the mallets
Clattered; and slowly the cumbersome carts
Were emptied of baggage, of weapons and armour
And corn for the horses and bread for the men
Until, with the noontide blazing above us,
The camp was alight with a stubble of spears,
And flicked by an odorous breeze from the kitchen
Dice-players parted and quarrels were quelled.
Thereafter, at sunset, the army unfolded,—
A wall without break like the fringe of the sea—
And rustling with voices and gazing with thousands
Of eyes to the East, it beheld on the hills

The troops of the Persian, like a primaeval
Measureless monster, creep to the plain.
Onward they wound. We could hear, as they opened
And took up their stations, the surf of their speech,
But not in the twilight, we judged, would they battle:
And doubling our sentries we gathered for sleep.

Endlessly tramping the cage of my trouble,
I loitered alone by the door of my tent.
The earth and the sunset now were as lovers
Dispassioned and severed who sorrow and yearn.
The hills grew harder and grim. Beyond them
Brooded a langorous wine-coloured air.
And then, as it faded alike from the heavens
And out of my spirit, aloft in the night
Glittered the glory of Asia, the sudden
Dazzling and infinite dew of the stars.
Hither and thither I strayed at random.
The huddled soldiers muttered or slept:
And as I passed them I felt with horror
How from that forest of dreaming minds
A dense and thunderous fear and blood-lust,
Like a miasma, floated and hung.
It left within me a grief so mighty
That life seemed flowing from poisoned springs;
And as at times in a sandy hollow
We heard redoubled the cry of the waves,

I heard the moaning of unborn ages
Mix with the moaning of ages gone.
Infinite pity outspread my being.
I grieved and marvelled that men, secure
Now from the blundering violence of nature,
Should not grow kindly, and use their years
Weaving and building, laughing and worshipping,
Reaping the harvest and treading the vine.
So did I grapple the last of all sorrows—
Impotent longing and shame for the world;
But over the slumbering armies, and over
The hills and the sad much-historied soil,
Shone—serene in the warless ether
And earthward-gazing—the eyes of time,
And mounting above it I saw how little
Is earth, how sorry and brief is man.
Then in my spirit I said, "Have courage!
Dare to imagine mightily! See,—
Men are but children. Why should you fear them?"
And, waxing heady with thoughts of space,
I felt within me a force outweighing
The world, a will that could wield the sun,—
That cried, "O sluggard, go forth, and silence
The puny quarrel of man with man!"
But still, half-dreading to storm the ramparts
Thrown up round me in boyhood years,

I faltered. Pulling against my vision,
The half of a life-time dragged me down:
And yet as I faltered I heard that Other
Crying in rapture, "Rise, and go forth!
Persian or Roman,—who could withstand me
Under the silent rebuke of the stars?"
Thus for a little in violent combat
The waxing and waning, the old and the new,
Wrestled: and then with a sudden onrush,
Over its dead self swept my soul.

The space for battle outspread no further
Than a stripped runner might go full-speed.
And now, clear-purposed, cloaking my raiment
Lest on its metal the moon might flash,
I spoke the password softly; and stealing
Beyond the sentry, as though to spy,
Across the star-pale hillocks or levels,
Running or creeping, advanced unseen.
Such exaltation, a will so certain,
A love so brilliant, illumined my brain
That, like a spirit ensphered in glory,
Serene and smiling I watched myself,
And saw how, moving by ancient instinct
Among the shadows,—and twice or thrice
Chilled by something he heard or fancied—
A soldier crossed the untrampled plain.

The Persians, fearing a midnight sally,
Had used for shelter a long low ridge.
I marked the myriads massed behind it.
I saw the sentries, a chain of eyes.
Prone on his belly was one so near me
That I could guess him a lonely man,
A thinker. Turning, he stared about me;
And as he shifted, his javelin top
Flashed. I knew he was grown uneasy.
I thought, "How strange . . . in a moment more
Our lives, that never have met, shall mingle
And mine be swung by a hair of chance!"
If I should falter, speaking his language,
He might—and coolly I looked on death,
Not as a soldier inured to courage
But like an eagle that eyes the sun.
Then, going forward with one hand lifted,
I took the open and dared his throw.
He saw me: sprang to his feet, and pointing
His weapon, uttered a warning cry.
The long ridge glittered with watchers. Moving
Steadily closer, and tense with joy,
I called "O brothers, I bring you comfort.
Lead me, a friend, to the king of kings!"
They heard. They whispered in awe. What was I?
A ghost? a demon? a prophet? a god?
They felt the splendour that robed my spirit,

But none had courage to rouse the king.
Then a voice murmured "the satrap!" Straightway
Two of them turned me and scarved my eyes,
And thus, traversing a sandy surface,
Guided me on through the silent camp.
At length we came to a light pavilion
With doors and purfling of scarlet silk,
And paused. The escort, craving admission,
Parleyed; and, brusquely, the guard went in.
He signed. I entered. A frowning satrap—
Whose face yet carried the mask of sleep—
Shifted his shoulders, and cursed: but noting
My rank, awakened and rose and bowed.
Soft was the glow of the light beyond him—
A flame in a circle of fretted bronze.
I marked his armour, his waiting weapons,
A jar of water, a bowl of fruits,
A couch and on it a fair sleek woman,
And through the shadow her shining gaze.
I stood there, silent. I was all wonder.
We seemed like players who act by rote,
Like little figures of mighty meaning;
And through me drifted a long-past woe . . .
The satrap watched me stare at his woman.
His mouth grew harder. He bade me speak,
And I, beholding the world in little
And charged with pity for all that lives,

Felt as I loosened my long-pent passion
The will of the whole earth sweeping me on.
All my vision I gave, and vainly.
Fate was with him. His heart was walled.
Fate, for ever seeking a balance
Between the contrary wills of men,
Now from the garden of Aphrodite
Came in a tempest and bowed my soul.
I felt the splendour fading around me.
I watched the Persian, and saw him smile.
And then the woman with eyes that glistened
Murmured his name—and I hoped anew:
But there that night as they lay in dalliance
The two had quarrelled, and seeing her now
Kindle to world-wide love and compassion,
He sprang at her pity to crush her pride.
He clapped his hands for a signal. Soldiers
Entered, listened, and wheeling round
Led me—dizzy with mute amazement
That such high rapture could end in shame—
Past the elephants, past the howdahs,
Past the chariots, into a tent
Small, unlighted and evil-smelling:
And there they cast me, and there I crouched
With gutted spirit and mind that huddled
In flickering tatters of self-disgust.
Nothing was left to me now. I knew it.

I had no place in the striving world.
Persian or Roman alike would spurn me.
As mad Ixion was dashed to earth,
I lay there, battered and stunned with failure.
One thought only could urge my will.
Seeing me quiet, a drowsy soldier
Had propped his javelin against the door.
Cunning and eager as men in a famine,
I crept to the handle, and pausing in fear
Heard the men mutter outside, and beheld how,
Turning their faces, they studied the East
Where, in the darkness, the jag-topped mountains
Blackened as up to them silted the dawn.
I grasped the javelin. I pulled it inward.
I snapped it sharply, and gripping the blade
Plunged it into my heart; and, choking,
Shrank to an atom of red-hot pain,
And tearing asunder the world and the senses
Reeled from life to a fire-streaked void.

Each man living is earth and heaven.
He does not gaze on the truth itself
But on its images inwardly mirrored;
And each is little at once and great.
Marooned by birth, he begins to signal,
Bridging the ocean with flags of love,
And others answer, and each, though severed,

Slowly re-merges his being in Man.
The will of nations had gulfed me under.
I flowed, as water in water flows,
With that huge river of things forgotten
That streams for ever behind the world,
Not to return till Rome and Persia
With all their folly and pride were still:
But something greater than I, the Roman,
Had waked and quickened with love for man;
And out of its anguish rose my spirit
With wider vision to vaster joy.

MIDPIECE IV.

(MARS.)

MOMENTS there are that make us hold our breath
For wonder of existence; when a change
Leaves the familiar sky and earth so strange
That we seem barely touched by life and death:
Nor do we find
These unforeseen oases of the mind
Mostly in hours of peace but, if at all,
Rather by some chance quirk within the brain
Or when dire peril cuts our being in twain
And what in us can die looks dim and small.
For sometimes we are thus wakened when we pass
Unthinkingly our phantoms in a glass,
Or when a carriage-lamp gives fleeting sight
Of someone on a wintry road at night;
And many a navigator numbed with fear,
And many a soldier watching death draw near,
Has felt his being divide
And from his doomed form strangely turned aside.

Such wells of wonder give the spirit new birth;
And he who finds them, he
Who ever felt how strange it is to be,
Knows that he has but dipped awhile to earth
And is not native there—
Even as the gulls, that have their home in air,
Will sometimes, wanting food, visit the sea.

SANCTUARY.

VAINGLORIOUS age in which my lot is cast,
Greasy, mechanic, earless, eyeless age,
That with an idiot's hunger for mere speed
Blindly careers down a mistaken road,
And, boasting that it rules
Alike earth, sea and air, has brought new woe
But not more happiness to the lives of men—

Remember that old tale of mote and beam.
Pity not earlier ages for their ills.
Before the frost of science blurred the soul
Or with ingenious folly men had wrought
A world of steel and flame,
Earth had surrendered all that man may need
For wisdom or for graciousness of life.

So was it when around the Cross at Rome
The motley realms of Europe stood in league,
And from stout castles men in tossing ships
Fared on a perilous enterprise of years
To plunder and to pray
In those far lands where dark-eyed multitudes
Had built sun-flashing cities green with palms.

So was it when King Richard, that great boy,
Ruled with his knights the land of Aquitaine,
Where, riding round the walls of old Limoges
Or up her cobbled alley-ways, I dwelt,
A bishop—not of those
Who pluck at power, but melancholy and stern
Because the world would not give all to Christ.

For none then doubted that what man might know
Of earth, of heaven, of God and of himself,
Like a cathedral, to the last chiselled leaf
Lay finished for all time, and might be learned
Before a man were gray
If patiently he mused the precious words
That Aristotle or Augustine penned.

This had I done. I held within my brain
An image of Creation bright and small,
And saw the road of man as on a map
With good and evil plain as rock and sea.
What wonder if I wept,
Watching him steer for Hell, and would not wink
At violence, guile and the black sins of lusts?

For me that year had stripped the world of joy.
No sooner had the Spring begun to break
Than travellers told how in the Holy Land
My brother, my sole brother, had been slain:

And now for many a month
Loneliness and fair memories of our youth
Had pointed all my thoughts to Paradise.

His son alone remained among my kin—
A knight who, favouring France and loving not
King Richard, rode up seldom to my gates.
Moreover, he was one who gave his heart
To minstrels, men-at-arms
And falconers, and who could not think on death
And did not feel God's Eyes watching the world.

Now had midwinter come: beyond the walls
Poor folk dug woodland wreckage from the snow;
The market-square lay printless: and one day
As I read, huddling near the brazier's heat,
A servant from my church
Brought me such ill news of my brother's son
That I forgot Boethius, and sat blind.

He told me, as the whisper on all lips,
That while the Count, King Richard's underlord,
Lay for the last month fevered in a tower,
The Countess and my kinsman had drawn close;
And beauty and twin youth,
Dazzled from reason by excess of joy,
Had brought them naked to one secret bed.

Their sin, I knew, was common. Had it not
Like a miasma clung about the world
Since Adam's Fall? Yet for their sin I grieved,
Not for their danger. Great their danger was,
For when death seemed most sure
The Count had drunk of sleep and come forth healed:
And in those days a wronged man did not spare.

I marvelled that a soul should spit at God,
And for the lewd delirium of an hour
Forego Eternity. Heedless of the cold
I stayed, until the wintry light was gone,
Contending with despair:
Then kneeled upon the flags, and in the dusk
Prayed long before a gilded crucifix.

And as I prayed I heard the roar of Hell,
The innumerable company of the damned
Wailing, and saw how Satan with cat's eyes
Urged the horned devils where they plied their forks.
Because I loved my kind
I suffered, for I knew that no one man
Had strength enough to cleanse a world so foul.

As for the knight my kinsman, though none now
Could shield him from dire vengeance for his deed,
I swore that with God's aid he should repent

While penitence availed: but how to act
I knew not, knowing well
His will at once too stubborn to be bent
And his hot spirit too wanton for grave thoughts.

When the next day had come I penned a page
And sent it to the Countess by a priest.
Therein I prayed her for the love of God
To speak with me. "What matters all the rest,"
I wrote, "but this one thing—"
"That heaven shall not be closed against the soul?" . . .
She knew me gentle-minded, and she came.

As a poor man may sit within his chair
Above a hoard of long-forgotten gold,
We, that had loved in Alexandria, now
Met with the ceremonial of new times,
Countess and bishop: she
Owning her guilt but powerless to turn back,
I seeking to throne God where passion ruled.

I pleaded long and vainly. Satan smiled,
Secure upon the battlements of her soul.
For though she saw death nearing, though she knew
That from the sky God frowned upon her sin,
And though at thought of Hell
She trembled like a rose, passion had cast
Upon her will a cataleptic sleep.

"And if," she cried, "he drag me to the stake—
That too I will endure. Before I found
What love could be it was not hard to live,
But life henceforth must take me on my terms;
For though I stood arraigned
Before the court of heaven and Christ Himself
I could not feign repentance for such joy!"

With that, she drew her furry mantle close,
And paused and, suddenly stooping, kissed my hand
So that I felt her tears fall on it. Then,
Lifting away the arras from the door,
Went down the winding stairs.
I watched her from a window while she rode
Slowly between two banks of melting snow.

Throughout the long affairs of that whole day
Grief thrummed my thoughts—grief that so fair a soul
Should have a body so treacherous for its house.
I stilled the quarrelling peasants hour by hour,
But even when the door
Closed on the last, and the woods meshed the sun,
I could not still the tumult in myself.

A servant brought me candles, and I made
Pretence of reading; but the rush-green floor,
The crucifix, the arras, the black chair
Accused me, crying, "Here was it that she smiled,

Here was it that she wept
Here for the last time did your soul touch hers—
For the last time—and Satan led her forth."

I rose. I felt my senses and my will
Stifling among those too familiar shapes.
Everything that I looked on parched my sight;
And seizing a horn-lantern and a staff
I set out for my church—
To seek God's aid where every stone, I knew,
Stood hallowed by five hundred years of prayer.

The world was bleak and gusty as I walked
Through swinging pools of light across the snow;
And under those wild clouds I could have wept,
Thinking how weak man is and how forlorn:
Nor did that sorrow lift
Until at length, climbing a street of steps,
I saw the long church gaunt against the night.

I entered by a low door to the south
Where Eve and Adam lightly doomed mankind.
A towering gloom enclosed me. In its depth,
Beyond great pillars, little spearheads flamed,
Petitioning for the dead:
And, all bemazed, the hobbling sacristan
Bowed to the blessing that my fingers made.

And there before the altar, while I knelt
And held between my hands a reliquary,
God or an angel streaming through my thoughts
Made such a bridge of splendour with his flight
That, gazing from its foot,
I saw, far up, all heaven: and in my heart
Peace came forth unimprisoned like a sun.

"Poor sinners, have no fear," I said in mind.
"You shall repent, and God receive you back."
And thus in dizzy mood my soul endured
More than an hour, and then suddenly dropped,
So that I found myself
Hungry and tired but fain of that soft ache
Which follows when we soar beyond our use.

And while I lingered, summoning will to go,
The old man, who had pulled the western door
Half open and stood peering through the murk,
Let slip a call of terror. When I turned
I heard faint angry shouts
And the snow-muted clap of horses' hoofs
Coming—at a great speed—toward the church.

The sacristan was trembling, and in hope
To check his fear I bade him light my lamp.
Then, as I stood beneath the big round arch
Listening, I thought "Men cannot ride in snow.

There is but one clear street—
From the Count's castle hither." And I prayed,
"Lord Jesus, purge their souls before they die!"

The hurrying noise drew nearer. Single words
Clove the mixed cries. At length, across the space
That held the neighbouring houses from the church,
I saw two riders rein their horses back,
Dismount, and keeping close
Move onward to the steps on which I stood:
And in the hand of one shone a bare sword.

Black though it was, I knew them. On the steps
They held back, for the lantern lit my face.
We said few words and quickly—I "Speak out:
What have you done? what brings you?" and the man
"Give sanctuary! The door—
Set wide the door!" and then the woman, "Now
For love of God have pity! Let us pass!"

And I again, "Where is the Count?" and he,
"Have it then! I have sent his soul to Hell."
I stood aghast. "Give sanctuary!" they cried—
And hard at hand we heard the fierce pursuit.
"Children," I said, "repent!
And if I yield, swear by God's Holy Blood
Not to touch lives again for evermore!"

Had I but seen how falsely they love God
Who love man less, I should not then have stored
A far-off life of misery for my soul.
I heard those lovers murmuring mouth to mouth,
Not weighing this with that
But only uttering little names of love:
And in that moment the dense air went red.

A throng of horsemen, each with a blown torch,
Clattered toward us over the flagged yard;
And through the daze and din flew past the words.
"If God and man reject us, we must die."
Then from her lover's belt
The Countess pulled a dagger: and they stood,
Waiting their murder, half way up the steps.

All that I did was fruitless. None could hear.
Men stumbled in the lurid snow, and pikes
Glittered, and wild eyes caught the hovering glare.
I saw the knight's blade flash and smite and flash:
I saw the Countess reel,
And her blood pour. A great shout rose, and then
Came silence. The men saw me. They knelt down.

MIDPIECE V.

(JUPITER.)

LET those who trust to science look with care
  Lest from that maze they never come forth free.
Does the bird-catcher hope to catch the air,
  Or does the fisherman try to net the sea?

And shall the intellect compass or contain
  The mightier spirit? What though the wit of man
Learn every path and bypath of the brain?
  None lives in Rome by poring on her plan.

Neither can inward knowledge be assayed
  Within the balances of the outward mind.
The spirit has no division, and is so made
  That only by becoming can it find.

Who never wonders, never shall be wise;
  But where is he that with vain talk would prove
The marvel of existing to sealed eyes,
  Or to a schoolboy what it is to love?

THE DARK NIGHT.

IF of two motions one had greater might,
Earth would dissolve in atoms. Even thus
May no man tilt the scales of joy and woe
But fate shall bring them level. Age by age
My will had scattered suffering; and at length,
Like victims round a tyrant when he dies,
All my ill-deeds came huddling from the past.
For now my spirit was near that awful change,
A thousand times more to be feared than death,
When, like a chrysalis, the old separate will
Perishes, and still ignorant of her wings
The spirit lies quivering in her shattered sheath.
Part of my tribute fate had exacted, most
Was now to be wrung forth. My violent deed
Upon that savage isle was cancelled out
By him who long ago went lame for life,
And in the satrap's tent I paid with woe
For woe once given in Aphrodite's Bower;
But still the wanton cruelty of a boy
In Babylon, and an old man's bitter zeal,
Lay ambushed in my soul. Not until these

Had spent their force, and hurling woe on woe
Battered my separate selfhood into dust,
Could I, or God within me, go forth free.

From half a hundred farms the Cotswold folk
Were gathering to the grey-roofed market-town.
Beyond the town a slope of hectic woods
Rose hard against the blue: and all the day
Was wistful with austere October light.
I stood before my window, sick at soul.
I watched men meet, and once more knew myself
A string ill-tuned, a foreigner to the world.
Love what men love or go unloved by men—
Such are the terms of life; and I, for more
Than forty years had cherished what men spurned
And what they sought had vainly striven to prize.
The townsfolk thought me cold, the gentry, crazed,
And seeing the zest with which I gathered truth
From Shelley, Boehme, Swedenborg and Blake,
My brother-clergy eyed me with distrust.
The massive melancholy that walled me in
Now made that old fair dwelling-house of priests
A prison. I rose. "Among the fields" I thought
"This mood may lift"; and going down the stairs
Paused by a little door that opened out
Into the long green garden. There I heard
My daughter playing some old air that once

Had pleased light ladies in the court of France:
And as I heard her voice, and hurried on,
The anguish of King Lear clothed me in fire.
I walked across the garden, through the town,
And following where the devious Windrush led
Came to a bridge of stone, close to a mill,
And stopped, and saw the dead leaves flowing by.
If I had lived a thousand years on end
I could not have been wearier. While I watched,
Half-hypnotised, the slowly sliding stream,
All my ill-starred barren and bitter life
Assailed my memory like a storm of sand.
I knew myself a failure; and though thus
Carrying the dead bulk of a self I loathed,
Saw the long stretch of years yet to be lived.
And then the tombs of youth gave up their dead.
I passed once more across those jagged days
When my sweet wife, whom I had loved so well,
Fled with another who once had been my friend.
I shuddered from the memory of his face.
The eighteen years unwound; and as I mused
Invisible sheets of flame ran down my nerves.
I thought how one who came from oversea
Had told me of her death, her violent death
Self-given; and how he brought me for her child
A token of remembrance. And therewith
My worst of sorrows, one that never slept,

Lashed me again. Continual as the light
That leaves the sun, a glow of love went forth
From me toward my daughter—such a love
As might have overflowed the living world:
But something from the unremembered past
Had sealed her heart. She gave me scarce a thought,
And spoke light words, and went her ways alone.
While thus I prodded that perpetual wound,
Suddenly, though my mind was callous now
With lifelong thoughts, I wondered if perhaps
God were indeed a phantom of man's fear,
The universe a patchwork of blind powers,
And death a sweet oblivion. This was more
Than a thought shaped and balanced in the mind.
My soul had split asunder with no sound.
I did not know it then, but with a phrase
Caught back my slipping spirit before it fell;
And while I brooded, leaning upon the bridge,
A young man stopped beside me, and we spoke.
Had I then seen the subterranean rent
Which was to overturn me, I had known
What made so sweet our talk of common things,
What made his nearness like a farmhouse light
To someone on the mountains in a storm.
Throughout the Cotswold country at that time
Railways were few. The men with whom I lived
Had mostly never seen that trail of smoke

In which the world's long past vanished away.
This man had come, he said, to scheme a track
Over our valley; and while he spoke I felt
The force of generations then unborn
Urging his eager will. And as we walked
Through fields and chattering streets to my sad home,
His pictures of an England new and strange
Were mingled in my many-layered thought
With glimpses of a sun whose changeless eye
Had seen the earth grow cool. Hour upon hour
We talked, and supper came, and he and she
Met, and at last—half smiling, half ashamed—
He left with me a new book, Darwin's book,
And went back to the inn. And all that night
I read the pages that unbuilt man's mind;
And when dawn touched me, knelt and strove to pray.
  Slowly the autumn smouldered, and our lives
Now moved amidst the ashes of the year.
Six days a week I tramped the sticky fields;
And as men turned in thought to Christmastide,
That challenging of my fundamental self
Ripened beneath my knowledge. Day by day,
And even perhaps in sleep, it waxed within,
And striving up to free birth in my brain
Sent forth puerperal troublings. Never yet—
Such was the general rumour—had I shown
More force or fervour when I prayed or preached.

Meanwhile, in daily converse with my friend
I scorned his thoughts, then smote them, and then shunned.
Nevertheless, I liked him. When we sat—
He, she and I—before the orange logs,
Often I wondered if those two might wed,
And sometimes through the turmoil of my soul
Caught their faint signals. Then, one afternoon,
Braving the loss of more than he yet knew,
He told me of his marriage, how his wife
Had turned to Rome and brooding on her sins
Went to a madhouse. My habitual mind
Recoiled. He might have been a leper. Nor,
After that, did I see him for some days.
But then his honesty and my child's contempt
And the self-healing instinct of the soul
Made me grow kind. He came. And though at first
I watched the lightest of their tones or looks,
The foolish fancy that no sinful love
Could stir my daughter, now that she knew all—
This and the pressure brought by Christmas days,
Their self-deceptions and my inward strife—
Slackened that vigilance. And the New Year broke;
And coming home one evening from the church
And seeking in my ruined mind for God,
I found them in the firelit music-room,
She sobbing and he silent. They had sworn
To love thenceforth as friends even to a glance

If, knowing that his work was almost done
And he in ten days due to leave the town,
I would but trust them. And again my soul—
Already like an incandescent world
Whose form had melted—having met the shock
Flowed to an altered shape. They kept their vow,
Talked gaily, seldom met and not alone:
And when the snowdrops came he travelled North.

Who that has tossed for days and weeks and months,
Uncertain of his course and dashed about
By strong desire, conscience, fear of the world's
Opinion and revolt against that fear,
Found ease in knowing that all things have their term?
We knew that well—she whom the future now
Dragged forward to fulfil her love, and I
Who still delayed to leap though all was flame—
But neither ceased from struggling. When in thought
I pictured how a godless world should look
To one no more immortal but mere dust,
I saw my life so wearisome and so vain
That to behold the houses or to read
The words of men who suffered and were still
Appeased me with their witness of sure rest.
Nevertheless, at last a shattered ship
Must sink or find a harbour: and it chanced
That on a writhing day of early March

I found, like one who wakes beside a corpse,
That I could feel no longer any pain.
A deathly calm had gripped me. Other men,
I knew, still looked with joy on fields or clouds
And gravely turned the leaves of printed books.
I knew that there were some—as I, of late—
Consumed with eagerness to deny or prove
God and the soul. From every sight or sound,
From every thought that faltered through my brain,
The savour was gone out. I had no wish
Even to die. The power to wish was gone.
And then my body rose and took me forth,
And hastened through the town, greeting its kind,
And having crossed a bridge and topped a hill
Entered the wind-wracked woods. And there I lay.
Cloud-fleeces crossed a heaven of many blues.
The branches raged around me. Close at hand
A badger paused; and while I watched, intent,
My bitter sense-of-being slowly thawed.
Over me all my misery rushed in spate.
An hour went by. Then, springing up, I strode
To the wood's edge, and saw the valley-town,
The old spire, and the Windrush, and a train—
Like some Silurian monster—moving West.
It made me think of him whose mind had wrought
Double disaster, and like a man pursued
I fled back through the trees. No one could spy

Or hear me. I was alone. The angered world
And the primeval noises of the wind
Stripped back the stuff of centuries from my soul,
And with a zest half-mad and half-divine
I stumbled through the clamour to and fro
Shouting "O world—O blind and sorry world—
There is no God! We dream and cannot wake.
Earth and the suns in heaven and creeping man
Move with no aim nowhither and nowhence.
And thou, gigantic and uproarious wind,
Thou mighty-clubbed invisible Hercules,
Cleanse the Augean stables of man's mind
And scouring East and West cry in his heart
'There is no God! The immortal soul is dust!
Play thou no more with hope. There is no God!'"
At length I stopped, a beggar now but free;
And standing with my back against an oak
Weighed what was next to do. When Sunday came
I would throw down the truth to all my church.
The men, the women, even the children too,
Would shun me. They had rather give me bread
To eat with lieing lips than have their town
Dishonoured by the honesty of her priest.
No one would say farewell, and with all speed
I should go forth for ever. Must we starve—
I and that loveless girl whose fate and mine
Were yoked with steel? Would she endure, at best,

Years of extremest penury? Come what would,
I was no Janus now; and being resolved
What I must do, what suffer and where smite,
A new strength urged me. Hurrying from the trees
I set forth for the town, and as I walked,
Heading the wind, I wondered if perhaps
My courage and the blackness of our path
Might loose her love at last. And in that hope
I saw my windows lighting up with lamps.

That night I learned how tough we are, how hard
It is to kill the gorgon-headed soul:
For, having sought through every room in vain
And listened long and eagerly for her step,
At last I found—by chance, behind the clock—
A letter . . . She had gone . . . She and her man
Were bound for some new country overseas—
Whither, she would not tell. "Since you," I read,
"Will count this love a sin against your God,
Let us divide our paths for evermore."
I laid the letter down, and stared at life.
Not only had it now no God, no eyes,
No sane intelligence gleaming through the mask,
Nothing that might be moved, but it showed forth
Impassive, unmalignant, imbecile,
A vast machine whose pistons pounded on
And against which wrath or appeal were vain.

Day after day I strove without a clue
To find her; then, by slow degrees, gave in
And lived upon the hope that in good time
She, being mine no more, would fear no more
To love me. So indeed it came to pass
But not till, having smothered out that hope
And with it all delight and even desire,
So that I dashed myself no more on life
But fell back, neither thirsting nor assuaged,
The spirit within me crawled from Stygian gloom
And went forth wing'd, knowing what Christ had known,
And in the joy of loving all who came
Found a new love of life. But ere I passed
Into that state which every man shall know,
The slowly-deadening hemlock of despair
Crept through my being. Childless, abjured, unhelped,
I left my town. The summer glowed and sank.
And then came news whispered across the world
Of gold-mines in Australia. With the first
Who sailed from England—uncouth fearless men,
Rascals and failures and men damned by law—
I went: and as the great ship wooed the wind
And I, unhealed, stood watching hour by hour
The aimless waves under the aimless clouds,
Far away in the warm Egyptian sand
The moonlight touched the pyramids, and through space
Burned the unpicturable gigantic suns.

MIDPIECE VI.

(SATURN.)

THE soul rebelled against her yoke.
The spirit bent down and heard. They spoke.

"Did Chance or God build heaven and earth?"
"*God.*" "And devised our death and birth?"

"*None else.*" "I grasp thy sorry scheme:
The world is God's uneasy dream!"

"*Not all uneasy.*" "Tell me this—
Dwelled He not once in perfect bliss?"

"*Before Time was.*" "And this again—
Why did He doom all things to pain?

"What need had God, being pure and whole,
To grieve Himself with form and soul?"

"*Here is a mystery.*" "Past thy thought?"
"*Even Lord Buddha here said nought.*"

"Tell me, that I may tell to men,
Why God made suffering?" "*Answer, then—*

"*Do they that carve in words or stone*
Find in their craft delight alone?"

"Exquisite agony." "*What were lost,*
Could they win beauty at no cost?"

"All joy." "*Thou sufferest, poor blind soul.*
God suffers, but foresees the goal."

THE VOYAGE.

SIGHT is within the seer and not the seen:
Time, too, exists not among changing forms
But in the soul they change, being her sight . . .
Thus from a cloudless peak
The Golden Eagle of metaphysic found.
I, therefore—like a man who fronts a wheel
And, looking upward from the fallen arc,
Sees that which moves toward him from above—
No longer stretching now
Memory, the mind's left hand, into the Past,
Put forth imagination and, with that,
Pluck what has yet to be.

All we have died. Oblivion smoothed us out
A thousand years before. And in those years
Empires had fallen apart, empires had flowered,
And men, destroying men,
Had driven the lightning down, sent earthquakes forth,
And to vast engines yoked the sea and sun.
For, swelling like a monstrous bubble, war
At last had flung together East and West

And, having globed the earth,
Perished. No more does man go forth to slay.
A single helmsman guides the single world,
While, as they will, the nations bow to one,
Many or few, to merchant, prince or priest;
And in that forest-land
Whither the bark of birth had brought me now,
Two equals, man and woman, steer the state.
The woman bears for sign a silver disc,
The man a cross of gold; and in our speech
We call these two the Rays of Moon and Sun.
Much has man prospered. Beauty robes his days.
He speaks with heaven. The seasons own his rule.
But none the less though life
Shows, from without, serene at last and fair,
New terrors, and more subtle, stalk within:
For having flashed the mind upon itself
Men have discovered dynamite in the will
And in the imagination poisonous barbs.
Most often he that hates,
Not using hand or weapon, steel or shot,
Strikes with a mood; projecting black despair
Or headlong folly, or casting—like a noose—
Madness around his foe.
Wherefore indeed, since always in this world
Evil and good push onward pace for pace,
Within a psychic school

Long-tested seers, drawn from a distant realm,
Watch the whole land for plague-spots in the mind.

Hard by a city of many golden roofs
A garden flowers; and there, a man still young,
I dwell, the garden's keeper. Neither birth
Nor the loud impulses of natural life
Had this time drowned in me the Eternal Self.
All actions on the hither side of death
Seem to me but as echoes, falling late,
Of mightier deeds elsewhere.
I see men now not as mere moving shapes
But magazines of force
That scatter out themselves in frost or fire.
Sometimes along the immeasurable Past,
Like music heard across a starlit lake
Sorrow or joy from someone long ago
Floats to my spirit. Sometimes among the woods
Beautiful beings, not denizens of space,
Nor old nor young nor conscious of mankind,
Flow through me like a perfume: and at hours
When, laying down myself,
I enter That which is not me alone,
Hearing and sight and all their world go out,
And in that radiant element under sense
I watch the vast vague dream-encompassed soul
Which is—to men—the earth.

Moreover, as my body lives by air
My spirit exists by that desireless love
Which has no boundary but the world. To know
Is now to love: to love
Is but to save the immortal spirit from sleep;
And merely not to drowse, to live awake,
Begets a joy so constant and so strong
As by its power to pull the whole world in.
So has it worked in me,
For year by year, although I sought out none,
Men more and more, like wanderers round a fire,
Have thronged about me. Such great multitudes
Now come that with the birth of each new moon
I lead them from the city, and on a hill
Speak what I know, and, living what I speak,
Ray forth a ring of such magnetic fire
That like a chain of lamps the listeners too
Kindle, and in their own light see the truth.
It is indeed their love
That one day brings me back again to death.
For with the rest, that evening, on the hill
Lies a man envious of my lot, and proud
That he, alone of all, remains unmoved.
Night comes, and in the dark
He and a score like-minded wing their way
Toward the capital. There with patient craft,
Wrenching my words awry,

He fans the Moonray's and the Sunray's fear.
They count me one who aims at single rule
And, looking what they say not, send him back.
Upon the morrow while, with no one near,
I watch the sun go down toward the sea,
This man and two beside him cross the sand.
They stop. They gather close about me. Thus
A little while we speak:
Then he whose will is fixed upon my death,
Pointing at me an instrument so small
That his hand shields it, and with no least sound,
Severs my heart and life. The suns goes black.
Night swamps me. Through a door
That shuts and opens I can hear the sea
A million miles away. Colossal hands
Grasp at me blindly, fumble, and fall back dead.
My being becomes a cloud; the cloud in turn
Shrinks to a crystal sphere,
And through that sphere like river-hurried leaves
A host of living phantoms, hard and bright,
Streams: and among them, ever changing form
But ever with the same eyes looking out,
One figure goes and comes.
Now in a lamp-lit room he kneels to pray;
Now, standing deep in snow before a church,
Beholds two suppliants murdered; next, with mind
Made humble by the stars, he weeps for man;

Then, shimmering round him waves of unseen fire,
Lies naked in the green grass; then, a boy,
Watches with dread another's life run out;
And, yet again returning, howls and leaps
And flings a live babe onto roaring boughs.
The brilliant crystal bursts;
A crash of thunder booms along my brain,
And the vast sea of life laps me no more.

It is as though I lay
Islanded in a virginal universe
That never trembled yet with light or sound.
No thought, no pain, no pleasure, no desire
Stirs in me. Self-enclosed
And like an embryo drowsing in the dark,
I am and yet I know not that I am.
So—dreamless in a black eclipse of Time—
I might endure for ever but that now
The sense that I am I
Tingles like blood within a frozen hand.
It moves within my torpid spirit for long
With such a weak and intermittent glow
As hardly to be felt; but, gathering heat,
Masters me more and more
Until indeed at last I know again
All the sweet ache of being. And with that,
Comes a vague thirst for something not myself.
A slow glad wonder brims me. Thought by thought

I build up long-lost memories of the world,
Of sky and sun, cities and trees and men,
First counting it the jetsam of a dream
But, as the pictures grow,
Wondering in what remotest youth of time
That world was gulfed away. The subtle shell
That holds me, being fretted thus by thought,
Melts, and my spirit with joy and terror mixed,
Such as our bodies feel when first they swim—
Floods forth, and finds itself
Centred amidst a huge and dusky light.
And then a low long sigh comes wavering up
From an abysm in which the suns are motes.
The dusk begins to glow, to shine, to blaze,
And on a sudden the soul within the earth
Enfolds me like a cloud.
Oceans and hills, deserts and plains of ice
Besiege my vision; the sun, an amber globe,
Unblindingly moves onward. Thus the world
Like a huge orchestra that plays at full
Swirls round me till at length—as here and there,
Like gulls amid a storm,
The notes of some faint instrument float out—
Small separate human actions pin my thoughts.
An old man meditates beneath a palm;
Snow flutters round a woman trudging home;
A dark-skinned girl weeps for her babe; two men

Are quarrel ng at a table set with wine;
A mongol throws a fish-net; pale with grief,
Her fingers round a tall glass brimmed with death,
A woman stands within a moonlit room,
And on her breast flashes a silver disc.
She lays the disc aside.
I see her woe made visible round her form,
A net of quivering hues, and in their midst
An image of my dead shape on the sand.
I see how slowly time has pulsed on earth,
How seers have found the truth
And struck her spirit with anguish for my end.
I know her for the Moonray but not less
For one whose fate had intercrossed with mine
From the first ages. Love—
More rapidly than a beam from star to star—
Carries me outward from the central earth
To where she waits, footing the pool of death.
My spirit moves in hers;
And straightway at the touch an aureate glow,
Like water that a dipping hand has ring'd,
Spreads from her heart throughout her being. The glass
Drops to the floor. She paces to and fro,
Sinks outworn on a couch, and fades in sleep.
So brilliant grows the light through which I look
That the material shapes of earth are dimmed.
I know them now but waves

Among the elements that lie strewn in space,
Mere heavings of the world as through it life
Went shuddering like the moon's force through the sea.
Then, for a while, I feel as one whose eyes
Are cancelled by a mountain-fog at noon.
A gust of terror skims me as I stare,
Upheld within white radiance. But at length,
Faceting all the void,
Come glints of sapphire blue and flame-bright green,
And through their unresisting depth I pierce,
Becoming now in form at once a man
And a wing'd bark that sees and hears, and flies
By tremulous instinct on toward her goal.
Under my keel the glittering atmosphere
Turns to a dense and rushing stream of sparks,
But overhead and round me, fading back,
Melts to the height of heaven; and in its place
A phantom world looms out.
I see titanic temples wrought of ice,
And coral-hued translucent mountain-peaks
That shelving down beyond the utmost sight,
Come forth from nothing. Forests fold me in—
Forests of colour clear and keen as flame
But in their form as variable as cloud—
And speeding on through glory I myself
Become the rapture that I hear and see,
For all that maze of splendour myriad-hued

Is but a visible music, and the sound
Itself the ecstasy of a spirit within.
My bark dissolves away;
The singing colours tremble; a blaze of light
Dazzles them out and soaring upward makes
The whole huge heaven a fan of flashing fires,
And in their midst I see
The spirits that have dominion over suns
Treading a dance of joy. And as in turn
Each of those luminous and majestic forms,
Coming full face before me, looks with eyes
That do not see but rather shine forth bliss,
I, overwhelmed with horror and with shame,
Find in each face my own.
At this—but whether up-rising from myself
Or from those towering images in their dance
I cannot know—a voice of anguish cries:
"No more! No more! Let me exist no more!"
And straightway colour, movement, sound and shape,
The universe without and I within,
Burn into one sole diamond-point of light,
Not great nor small but measureless and the sum
Of whatsoever shall be, is or was.
A sense of yearning dwells within the light
And something, too, that sighs "Not yet, not yet."
The yearning ceases, and the light becomes
Itself the sigh "Not yet."

ENDPIECE.

(THE SUN.)

LOVE, the true love that seeks for nought,
The love that Christ and Buddha brought,
Comes, like a wind, we know not whence,
But comes not from the world of sense.

Into the universe of fate
It flashes from some other state,
No longer clear, no longer free,
But as light wavering down the sea.

Through all the tale of man it runs,
A whisper from beyond the suns,
A dream of something fair and far,
A memory and a guiding-star.

Thither do we and all things climb
Laboriously from space and time,
And there alone is being bliss . . .
Doubt what you will but doubt no this.

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